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SUBJECT: US-ARGENTINE BILATERAL TIES; AMIA BOMBING CASE AND IRAN;
GSP; DEATH OF PINOCHET; 12/13/06; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Leading international stories today include US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon's statement that the US is working 'fantastically' with the Argentine Government; the current state of the Argentine-Iranian ties following an Argentine court decision to charge eight former Iranian government officials with the AMIA bombing case; the Argentine Foreign Ministry's statement announcing that the US Congress extended Trade Benefits Regime applied to a number of Argentine exports for two years; and the aftermath of the death of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

Leading "Clarín" and business-financial, center-right "InfoBae" report on yesterday's PAS press conference with US Speaker Terrence O'Brien, Deputy Director at the California Energy Commission, on California's initiatives to encourage energy efficiency and new energy sources and its efforts to protect the environment.

2. OPINION PIECES

- "US hints at better dialogue with the (Argentine) Government"

Leonardo Mindez, on special assignment in Washington for leading "Clarín," writes (12/13) "The USG official in charge of regional affairs, Tom Shannon, stated that improved dialogue with the Kirchner administration during recent months 'reflects our understanding that Argentina has strategic importance,' and he appeared confident that the bilateral relationship would be 'strengthened'.

"During a break at a conference at the Council of the Americas in New York, Shannon mentioned his talks with Kirchner and Ministers Alberto Fernandez and Julio De Vido last September... and the arrival of the new US Ambassador to Argentina, Earl Anthony Wayne, as some of the factors that allowed for improved feelings between Washington and Buenos Aires.

"Shannon said 'We cleaned up our (bilateral) agenda and that was useful.' 'Sometimes one gets lost in rhetoric and we should acknowledge that we share strategic interests, and that those interests are at last reaching the surface again.'"

- "Kirchner, the focus of criticism and cautious praise in the US"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nación," writes (12/13) "During a seminar, US Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon said yesterday that the US is working 'fantastically' with the Argentine Government. During the same seminar, two former Latin American Foreign Ministers criticized President Nestor Kirchner for his

'leftist populism.'

"The seminar, which was entitled 'Regional politics the year after elections,' was organized by the Council of the Americas, the same forum which hosted Kirchner's dinner with Shannon, Wall Street businessmen and analysts last September.

"Shannon opened the event with a speech and Q&A session that lasted for 53 minutes, during which he carefully avoided referring to Argentina or Kirchner. His message carried a general tone. He said: 'The time has come for us to connect with the region in a friendly way and to play a significant role in its development.'

"The Bush administration's representative for Latin America added that 'all countries, with a couple of exceptions, acknowledge that it is necessary to establish a relationship with the US.' Without mentioning President Hugo Chavez, he immediately referred to him - 'The most obvious exception is Venezuela, whose confrontation, based on political reasons, does not reflect reality.'

"... Shannon chose to highlight the bilateral relations (between the US and Argentina), which 'have good dialogue, confidence, frankness,' and 'are working fantastically in Haiti, at the UN, in many areas,' and he predicted that, with the arrival of US Ambassador Earl Wayne, the bilateral relationship will be 'deepened.'"

- "'There are no grounds for a protest'"

Left-of-center "Pagina 12" reports (12/13) "The (Argentine) Government did not turn a deaf ear to Iran's warning that 'Argentina has entered a dangerous game' - the Argentine Foreign Ministry told the Iranian Charge d'Affairs in Buenos Aires, Mohsen Baharvand, that it considers 'unacceptable' the terms in which Argentine representative to Tehran Mario Quinteros was summoned following the (Argentine) Judiciary's decision to order the capture of former

Iranian President Ali Bahrmaie Rafsanjani and other seven suspects in connection to the AMIA bombing case. The Foreign Minister also told Baharvand of the Argentine 'concern' over the Iranian administration's initiative to make a historical revision of the Holocaust."

- "No war over peanuts"

Left-of-center "Pagina 12's" columnist Fernando Krakowiak writes (12/13) "The US Congress extended the GSP, which benefits a number of imports from developing countries. In early August, the USG had said that it was planning to remove those advantages for Argentine exports, but they were finally maintained.

"There was speculation in the Argentine Government that the eventual removal of the GSP could have been linked to President Kirchner's closeness to his Venezuelan counterpart, Hugo Chavez, and to Argentina's rejection of the FTAA... Nonetheless, Foreign Ministry sources told 'Pagina 12' that the changes introduced 'will not alter the trade benefits for our country.' During 2005 and under the GSP, Argentina's exports to the US climbed to 616.5 million dollars, which accounts for 15 percent of total exports to the US."

13. EDITORIALS

- "Chile, the memory of a dictatorship"

An editorial in leading "Clarín" reads (12/13) "The death of former dictator Augusto Pinochet has made both Chile and Latin America resort to their historic memory in order to differentiate the tragedies and traumas of the past from the current and future challenges.

"Pinochet was the best example of a Latin American dictator taken to the extreme... The historic context of the time favored him - during the Cold War, Latin America was a scenario of clashes between insurgency and counter-insurgency groups that led to the rise of anti-Communist military dictatorships, which were permitted, if not supported, by the US.

"... Pinochet's death has closed a gloomy chapter of Latin America's

history, which will perhaps be analyzed, discussed and researched, but should never be repeated."

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